



These Daring Disturbers of the Public Peace: The Struggle for Property and Power in Early New Jersey

Brendan McConville

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During the century preceding the American Revolution, bitter conflicts raged in New Jersey over control of the land tenure system. This book examines how the struggle between yeoman farmers and landed gentry shaped public life in the colony. At once a cultural, political, and social history, it carefully delineates the beliefs of rioters and upholders of order, both of whom wanted control over the land.

Brendan McConville describes how changes in provincial society—affecting politics and government, religious life, economic conditions, gender relations, and ethnic composition—led farmers to resort to violence as a means of settling property disputes. He examines the disagreements in light of competing conceptions of property held by separate landowning classes, differences in the legal and political traditions of British and Dutch colonists, and local conditions unique to New Jersey. He also considers the ways in which the lack of a shared perception of deference to authority among Puritan, Dutch, and multi-ethnic communities helped foster insurrection.

According to McConville, the social transformations brought into sharp focus by the agrarian unrest ultimately undermined imperial control and encouraged the creation of a new American identity. His book is a careful account of a colony that has seldom been seriously examined by colonial historians and a challenge to those scholars to rethink commonly accepted arguments about the development of the United States.

Winner of the Driscoll Prize from the New Jersey Historical Commission.

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